



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES





## Play Unified. Live Unified.

Special Olympics New Jersey is committed to ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to participate safely and successfully in Physical Education and athletic, extracurricular and recreational activities that lead to a healthy, active, and fulfilling lifestyle.

Throughout the year, Special Olympics New Jersey offers training and competition in 24 sports to 25,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities. An area of targeted growth for Special Olympics programming is partnering with and supporting New Jersey's schools. Currently, over 10,000 students, in over 100 schools and 10 colleges, experience sports, fitness, fun and friendship in environments where everyone is welcomed through Special Olympics' school-based Play Unified Clubs and Unified sports and social inclusion programs.



## Play Unified School Partnership Program

Through the Play Unified School Partnership program, Special Olympics New Jersey offers schools and districts grants, professional and coaches training, equipment and technical assistance to support them in designing and implementing robust, sustainable fully inclusive sport, fitness and extracurricular programs to enrich the lives of all their students.



## What is Special Olympics Unified Sports®?

Special Olympics Unified Sports® joins people with and without intellectual disabilities together as teammates, each one a meaningful and equal part of the team. Teams are made up of peers of similar age and ability who play together in developmental, recreational or competitive settings. It is inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.



Co-curricular	Interscholastic	SONJ/Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive P.E.</li> <li>• 3 on 3 &amp; mini-tournaments</li> <li>• SONJ Play Unified Club sports &amp; fitness activities</li> <li>• Unified Game Days</li> <li>• Unified Sports clinics</li> <li>• Intramurals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SONJ Play Unified club competitions</li> <li>• NJSIAA athletics; inclusive team participation and/or Unified divisions/events</li> <li>• School-based Special Olympics training and competition program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based SONJ training and competition</li> <li>• Community-based adaptive sports &amp; fitness programs</li> <li>• Inclusive sports and fitness at recreation centers</li> </ul>

## Join the Partnership!

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## The Playbook on the New Jersey Sports Legislation

By: Maria E. Fischer Esq. and S. Paul Prior Esq.  
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On June 19, 2014, Governor Christie signed legislation regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in athletic activities (N.J.S.A. 18A:11-3.5 et seq.). This historic law is effective in the 2015 – 2016 school year.

### 1) Why is the new sports law important?

This law requires school districts *ensure students with disabilities have equal access and opportunities to participate in athletics*, as well as, *provide opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in existing adaptive and Special Olympics Unified Sports® programs*. It applies to athletic programs including clubs, intramural, and interscholastic athletic activities.

### 2) What is required of school districts under the new sports law?

School districts must make reasonable efforts to provide a student with a disability the opportunity to participate in existing adaptive or Special Olympics Unified Sports®. Therefore, *school districts must be prepared to provide inclusive sports options for students with disabilities as early as July 1, 2015*.

### 3) How does this law differ from requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”)?

IDEA	NJ SPORTS LEGISLATION
1. Provide equal opportunities to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities	1. <b>ENSURE</b> equal access and opportunity to participate in athletic activities
2. NO requirement to provide nonacademic services and extracurricular activities to students with disabilities	2. District must make reasonable efforts to provide opportunities to participate in existing adaptive and Special Olympics Unified Sports®
3. Requires an IEP team determination of the extent a student shall not participate	3. Student must be allowed to try out for and if selected participate in athletic programs
4. Must include supplemental aids and services students need to participate	4. Same
5. Unclear the extent to which reasonable modifications must be provided	5. <b>MUST</b> make reasonable modifications as long as the modification does not create a health or safety risk or fundamentally alter the game
6. Students with disabilities do not have a right to be on a competitive team	6. Same
7. District does not have to create separate activities for students with disabilities	7. District must provide an opportunity to participate in existing adaptive or Special Olympics Unified Sports® existing adaptive and Special Olympics Unified Programs

### 4) Is a student entitled to play on a competitive team?

No, a student with a disability is not entitled to play on a school’s competitive team. However, this legislation ensures a student with a disability must be given an opportunity to try out for and if selected, participate on a competitive team. If not selected, districts must provide students with an alternative adaptive or Special Olympics Unified Sports® option.

### 5) Is a district required to provide modifications and accommodations to a student?

Yes, each school district must ensure the provision of reasonable modifications or services necessary to give a student with a disability an equal opportunity to participate in athletic activities.

### 6) Are there exceptions which limit a student’s opportunity to participate in athletic activities?

Yes, if inclusion of a student with disabilities presents an objective health or safety risk to the student or to others; or fundamentally alters the athletic activity. In either of these instances, the student may not be able to participate in the activity, but the District **must** provide the alternatives mentioned above.

### 7) Who decides if an objective health or safety risk exists or if there is a fundamental alteration to the game?

This is not specifically addressed in the law. Based on other cases it seems clear, it is not the coach or athletic director alone. It is likely that this will be an IEP team decision. Remember, Athletic Directors and or coaches can be included as IEP team members.

### 8) If a student attends an out-of-district school program, what are his rights under the new law?

A student in an out-of-district school program has the right to participate in the athletic programs of the sending school district. There is, however, no requirement for the out-of-district school to create and provide athletic programs.

Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation.  
Authorized and accredited by Special Olympics Inc. for the Benefit of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities



# UNIFIED GAME DAY

## Robbinsville High School

**Special  
Olympics**  
New Jersey



### What We Did

Our first Unified Game Day brought students from our high school and middle school special needs classes, and Project UNIFY members together to engage in outdoor activities and bonding. All participants received t-shirts for the event. We paired Project UNIFY members with and without intellectual disabilities and divided them into two teams, with a color to identify each. As it rained sporadically throughout the day, we had to adjust our schedule accordingly. Our day began with a game of musical chairs, we then took a brief break and had a snack. When the rain let up, we split into smaller groups that went through rotations of cornhole, water balloon toss and tug-of-war. We moved up our awards ceremony, where Project UNIFY members presented award ribbons to their teammates with disabilities under the cover of the bleachers. We headed into the school common area to have lunch, which was donated by a local pizzeria. Instead of playing kickball as planned, we watched a movie inside our school. Our superintendent joined us for closing remarks. Despite the weather and condensed time frame, all the students shared lots of smiles and friendships.

### Sample Schedule

9:00-9:30 AM	Athletes Arrive/Opening Remarks
9:30-10:00 AM	Musical Chairs
10:00 -10:15 AM	Break/Snack
10:13-11:45 AM	Rotations: Cornhole & Relays, Tug-of-Wars, and Water Balloon Toss
11:45-12:45	Lunch
12:45-1:15 PM	Kickball
1:15-1:30 PM	Awards Ceremony/Closing Remarks

### How to Plan Your Own Game Day

#### **Step 1: Get Approval from Your Board of Education**

Present a proposal introducing the idea and briefly outlining your plan to your Board of Education. Begin planning about four months in advance.

#### **Step 2: Select a Date**

When selecting a date, consider school-wide activities, potential weather conditions, and testing days (AP exams, state mandated testing, etc.) It is recommended that you pick a rain date a few days after your original date. We chose the end of May because we hoped for pleasant weather and all school-wide testing was over. As our field day approached, rain was predicted, but due to other factors we kept our original date.

#### **Step 3: Select Activities**

Select a variety of fun, outdoor activities that all participants can enjoy (it is helpful if you can borrow equipment). Plan events that are inclusive for all participants, including athletes with physical disabilities.

#### **Step 4: Arrange Transportation**

If athletes are coming from another school, speak to your administrators about coordinating transportation.

#### **Step 5: Create a Schedule**

Start by determining a beginning and ending time, taking into account the transport of athletes. It is more efficient to split participants into smaller groups that rotate through various activities. You may choose to split your participants into opposing teams (we did so by t-shirt color) for certain activities. Leave ample amount of time for lunch and breaks. Include an Opening Ceremony (our club advisor welcomed everyone and explained the activities), an awards ceremony (athletes were presented with a participation ribbon), and a Closing Ceremony (a school administrator can be invited to make closing remarks).

#### **Step 6: Purchases/Donations**

Ask local businesses to donate lunch. We ordered t-shirts, designed by a club member, for all participants and award ribbons for athletes using grant money. Although we borrowed most of the sports equipment from our school, we did have to purchase water balloons, bouncy balls and name tags. Snacks and water were donated by students and teachers. Club members also brought coolers and a tent. Depending on school funding, it may be necessary to raise money to make purchases.

#### **Step 7: Make Final Preparations**

Pair athletes with participants and form two teams. Make sure you have all activity equipment. Confirm food donations the day before. Club members set up about half an hour before the event. Be flexible and have fun!

### Activity Ideas

- Kickball
- Tug-of-War
- Water Balloons
- Relay Races
- Hula Hoops
- Cornhole
- Basketball Throw
- Wiffle Ball
- Jump Rope
- Outdoor Bowling
- Volleyball/Newcomb
- Musical Chairs

# UNIFIED KICKBALL TOURNAMENT

## Robbinsville High School

**Special  
Olympics**  
New Jersey



### Sample Schedule

Arrival: 10:00 AM

T-shirt handout/Introduction: 10:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Game #1: 10:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Soccer Shoot-out/ Break: 11:00 AM – 11:20 AM

Game #2: 11:20 AM – 11:50 AM

Lunch: 11:50 AM – 12:30 PM

Awards: 12:30 PM – 1:00 PM

### What We Did

Our first winter kickball tournament included students with disabilities from the high school and middle school levels, and Project UNIFY members from the high school, all working together, collectively engaging in activities that enabled friendships to begin and grow. All participants received a shirt (white, black, red, or grey) that determined which team they would represent. We began by handing out the shirts and took part in an introduction oriented game where we shared interesting facts about ourselves. Subsequently, we broke into our teams and played the first kickball game. After the first game, as a means of breaking up the day, we allowed each student to take one shot on the soccer goal and celebrate with his/her dance of choice. We then proceeded to play our second and final game, which led into a pizza lunch. The day was concluded with an awards ceremony, in which the Project UNIFY members presented their teammates with disabilities with ribbons and shared what made them a unique player.

### How to Plan Your Own Kickball Tournament

- 1. Acquire approval from a supervisor.** It is imperative that administration and teachers are on board with the event.
- 2. Select a date.** Be sure to consider if your date conflicts with any other school-events and plan a rain date if need be.
- 3. Select a venue.** Consider transportation needs and be sure to use a venue large enough to house several kickball games at the same time.
- 4. Create a schedule and set teams.** Creating even teams to ensure fair games is crucial.
- 5. Order t-shirts based off of the set teams.** It helps to order shirts ahead of time in order to accurately get the correct sizes and for efficiency purposes.
- 6. Fundraise/accumulate donations.** Needless to say, running this event costs money for food, venue and other general costs. It is important to figure out where this money is coming from.





Special Olympics Unified Sports® is an inclusive sports program that combines an approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) on teams for training and competition. Three models exist within Unified Sports: competitive Unified Sports, Unified Sports Player Development and Unified Sports Recreation. All three models provide different types of experiences in team sports such as basketball, football and volleyball and in other sports such as bocce, golf and tennis. Unified Sports is now offered throughout the world and has been a Special Olympics internationally sanctioned program since 1989.

Special Olympics Unified Sports promotes social inclusion through shared sport training and competition experiences for individuals with and without intellectual disabilities. Unified Sports has proven to be highly effective in achieving social inclusion. Athletes feel a sense of belonging; they can meaningfully interact with others, develop mutually rewarding relationships, are recognized as contributors and are received with acceptance and respect.

Research studies by Siperstein (2010) and Özer (2011) have confirmed the positive social impact of Unified Sports on individuals with and without intellectual disabilities as well as their communities. Unified Sports is effective in decreasing the problem behaviors of individuals with intellectual disabilities and improving attitudes of individuals without disabilities toward participants with disabilities. Unified Sports helps increase the skills necessary for individuals with intellectual disabilities to be accepted and fulfilled socially (developing meaningful relationships, being accepted and respected and being better prepared for community living).



All three models, defined below, have social inclusion as the core outcome; however, the structure and function of each model varies.

### Unified Sports (Competitive)

The Unified Sports competitive model combines Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) as teammates on sport teams for training and competition. Two things differentiate the competitive Unified Sports model from the other two models: 1) all athletes and partners on a Unified Sports competitive team must have attained the necessary sport-specific skills and tactics to compete without modification

of the current Special Olympics Official Sports Rules; and 2) teams that participate in this model may be eligible for advancement to Regional and World Games. A Unified Sports team is an inclusive sports program with approximately equal numbers of athletes and partners. Unified Sports teams should never be comprised solely of people with disabilities. Athletes and partners should be of similar age and ability in team sports. However, a greater variance in age and ability is allowed in specific sports such as golf. Refer to Article 1 of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for more details regarding age and ability matching by sport.

### Unified Sports Player Development

The Unified Sports Player Development model combines approximately equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) as teammates on sports teams for training and competition. What differentiates Unified Sports Player Development from the other two models is: 1) teammates are not required to be of similar abilities, and 2) teammates of higher abilities serve as mentors to assist teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics, and in successfully participating in a cooperative team environment. Athletes and partners should be of similar age. However, a greater variance in age is allowed in specific sports such as bocce. (Refer to Article 1 of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for more details regarding age matching by sport.) Because of differences in abilities, rules modifications are necessary and designed to both ensure meaningful involvement of all teammates and define for higher ability players their roles as mentors so they do not dominate play. Each Program is given the opportunity to establish rules modifications that fulfill these outcomes.

### Unified Sports Recreation

Unified Sports Recreation consists of inclusive recreational sports opportunities for Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners without intellectual disabilities. What differentiates this model from the other two is that this model does not follow any prescribed training, competition and/or team composition requirements established by Special Olympics. These recreational opportunities may take place in partnership with schools, sport clubs, the community and other private or public organizations as introductory one-day events, exhibitions or demonstrations (including *Unified Sports Experiences*) or ongoing activities such as physical education classes and intramurals.

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## INTERSCHOLASTIC UNIFIED SPORTS® INFO SHEET

### Special Olympics Mission

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

*"Special Olympics has pursued a fully inclusive sports participation path for people with various levels of intellectual capabilities and sporting abilities throughout our history, and with Unified Sports® since 1989"*

-Tim Shriver, Special Olympics Chairman & CEO

### National Federation of State High School Associations Mission (NFHS)

The National Federation of State High School Associations serves its members, related professional organizations and students by providing leadership for the administration of education-based interscholastic activities, which support academic achievement, good citizenship and equitable opportunities.

*"Inclusive school sports is an area of focus for us at the NFHS and we feel that Special Olympics Unified Sports is an ideal model for our schools to accomplish this"*

-Robert Gardner, NFHS Executive Director

### Project UNIFY®

Special Olympics Project UNIFY uses sports and education programs of Special Olympics to activate young people to develop school communities where all youth are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.

### Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports is an inclusive sports program that combines an approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) on teams for training and competition.

### Interscholastic Athletic Association Partnerships

**What:** A partnership between Special Olympics State Programs and their respective NFHS state member association to advance the mission and goals of both organizations. Project UNIFY is often the focus of these partnerships where Unified Sports is integrated as a sanctioned program of the state Interscholastic Athletic Association (IAA) for its member schools.

**Who:** According to the 2008 U.S. Census there are 14.98 Million students enrolled in U.S. Public High Schools (grades 9-12). It is estimated that 2% of all U.S. citizens have an intellectual disability (ID) and qualify as a Special Olympics Athlete (World Health Organization estimates 1%-3% globally have an ID). **This means there are as many as 300,000 potential Special Olympics athletes in public high schools.**

Special Olympics athletes team up with students without intellectual disabilities

to create proportionately rostered Unified Sports teams. These Unified Partners are recruited from the general education student population and typically do not have a background in competitive high school sports. Teams are formed and managed through the school Athletic Department. Special Olympics and the NFHS have developed a 90 minute online course for Coaching Unified Sports housed at [www.NFHSLearn.com](http://www.NFHSLearn.com), and offered at no cost.

There are currently over 2,000 schools in 40 states participating in Project UNIFY. Six of these states have an official Interscholastic partnership: Arizona, Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

**Why:** Interscholastic Unified Sports® increases school athletic participation by including a new population of students- both the Special Olympics athletes, and

the Unified Partners. Special Olympics athletes experience invaluable social inclusion and new sports opportunities. Project UNIFY changes attitudes about people with disabilities and positively impacts the climate in each school. Special Olympics is a lifetime program, when students get involved as youth, there is a good chance it will continue to impact the quality of their life after graduation.

*"Interscholastic Unified Sports brings a whole new dimension to an interscholastic program with a renewed perspective through the eyes of a new set of student athletes into our association membership, these young people may not have had the opportunity to participate in the past, now they do."*

- Chuck Schmidt, Associate Executive Director, Arizona Interscholastic Association



# Special Olympics Research Overview

**Special  
Olympics**



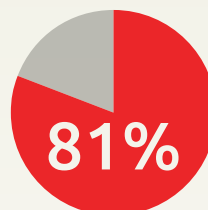
More than  
**4.5  
million**  
Special Olympics  
athletes  
compete across  
**170**  
countries,  
averaging  
**258**  
competitions  
each day  
around  
the world.



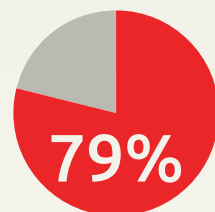
**94%** of Special Olympics athletes  
reported improved sports skills.



Children ages 2-7 experienced a  
**7 month gain**  
in motor skills after participation in an  
8-week Young Athletes program.



**81%**  
of students say  
that the Unified  
Strategy is  
changing their  
school for the  
better.

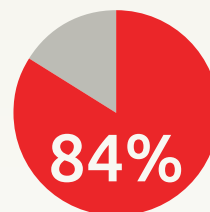


**79%**  
of Unified  
teammates  
without  
disabilities  
reported  
increased  
understanding of  
people with  
intellectual  
disabilities.



**65% of  
parents**

felt that participation in  
Special Olympics had raised  
their expectations of their  
sons and daughters.



**84%**  
of healthcare  
providers felt  
better prepared to  
treat people with  
intellectual  
disabilities.

Special Olympics'  
brand ranks highly in  
**familiarity  
and  
favorability  
ratings.**



**57%**

**Over half** of athletes' siblings in the United  
States felt that participation in Special Olympics brought  
their family closer together.



# Special Olympics Unified Sports Research

## WHY UNIFIED SPORTS?

While it is important for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) to have social experiences with their peers, oftentimes these experiences are elusive. For example, adolescents with ID are more likely to participate in activities with their family or on their own than with their peers.<sup>1,2</sup> Research suggests that organized social activities, such as sports, may be necessary to facilitate social involvement of people with ID in their communities.<sup>3</sup> **Unified Sports provides people with and without ID the opportunity to play on the same sports team, creating a space for friendships, physical activity, and fun.** Research on Unified Sports has found that Unified Sports athletes (participants with ID) experience improved social competence and social inclusion while decreasing problem behaviors.<sup>4,5</sup> Moreover, Unified Sports partners (participants without ID) improve their attitudes toward people with ID as a result of participating in the program.<sup>6</sup> In order to build upon this impact, Special Olympics continues to conduct research and evaluation to identify best practices and demonstrate the impact of Unified Sports on athletes, partners, and the community.

**“I can tell you this, there aren’t really many opportunities at all for her to leave and have a fun day like that, and be with peers, whether Unified friends or other special needs peers. It doesn’t happen at all. ...I think, something like this, to look forward to, having a feeling of activity of her own, friends of her own, that sort of thing, there’s no question in my mind that that’s a positive experience.”**

—Parent<sup>7</sup>

1 Hall, L. J., & Strickett, T. (2002). Peer relationships of preadolescent students with disabilities who attend a separate school. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 37(4), 399-409.

2 Abells, D., Burbidge, J., & Minnes, P. (2008). Involvement of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in social and recreational activities. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities*, 14(2), 88-94.

3 Abells, D., Burbidge, J., & Minnes, P. (2008). Involvement of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in social and recreational activities. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities*, 14(2), 88-94.

4 Özer, D., Baran, F., Aktop, A., Nalbant, S., Ağlamış, E., & Hutzler, Y. (2012). Effects of a Special Olympics Unified Sports soccer program on psycho-social attributes of youth with and without intellectual disability. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 33(1), 229-239.

5 McConkey, R., Dowling, S., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2012). Promoting social inclusion through Unified Sports for youth with intellectual disabilities: a five-nation study. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 57(10), 923-935.

6 Özer, D., Baran, F., Aktop, A., Nalbant, S., Ağlamış, E., & Hutzler, Y. (2012). Effects of a Special Olympics Unified Sports soccer program on psycho-social attributes of youth with and without intellectual disability. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 33(1), 229-239.

7 Nanavati, J. (2015). Unified Sports in School Settings: Evidence of Impact. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.



# IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Unified Sports is a key Special Olympics program, and over the course of the past five years it has seen tremendous growth. In 2014, **over 850,000 people with and without ID participated in the program**, a 21% growth rate from the previous year.<sup>8</sup> Athletes and partners benefit from Unified Sports in a number of ways. First and foremost, Unified Sports is a fun, challenging experience for athletes and partners that allows them to improve their sports skills and be part of a team.

- Participants enjoy their experience in Unified Sports. An [evaluation in Europe](#) found that large numbers of athletes (54%) and partners (40%) thought that **having fun was one of the most important aspects of Unified Sports**.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, having fun was one of the areas athletes and partners liked the most about participating in the program.<sup>10</sup>
- Unified Sports creates a place where athletes and partners strive to seek personal bests. An evaluation in Europe found that **partners reported feeling challenged** all (43%) or some (52%) of the time during training.<sup>11</sup>
- Participants improve their sports skills. Unified football athletes and partners in Europe **reported that their football skills improved** a lot (46%) or a little (46%).<sup>12</sup> A 2015 Special Olympics survey found that 91% of athletes and partners felt that their sports skills improved.<sup>13</sup>
- Preliminary research suggests that **Unified Sports can improve physical fitness among participants**. One study found that both athletes and partners improved their physical fitness after participating in Unified Sports when compared to those who did not participate.<sup>14</sup>

Similar to traditional Special Olympics sports, **Unified Sports also helps athletes and partners build confidence and self-esteem.**

- 82% of family members in the United States reported that athletes improved their self-esteem/self-confidence after participating in Unified Sports.<sup>15</sup>

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8 2014 Reach Report (2014). Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

9 Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

10 Siperstein, G., Hardman, M., Wappett, M., & Clary, L. (2001). *National evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Sports program*. A special report. Washington, DC: University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Utah, & Special Olympics, Inc.

11 Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

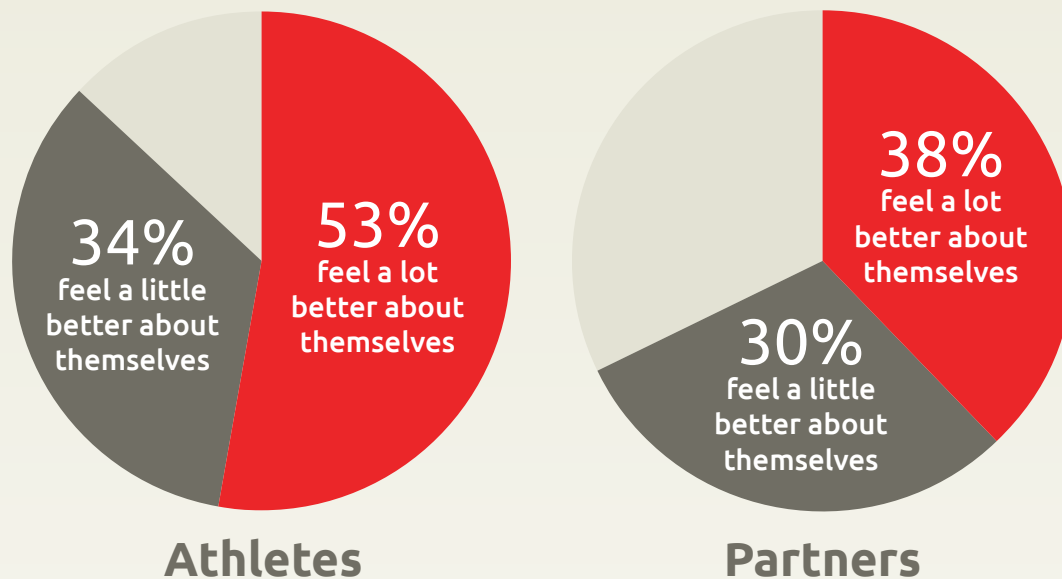
12 Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

13 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

14 Baran, F., Aktop, A., Özer, D., Nalbant, S., Ağlamiş, E., Barak, S., & Hutzler, Y. (2013). The effects of a Special Olympics Unified Sports Soccer training program on anthropometry, physical fitness and skilled performance in Special Olympics soccer athletes and non-disabled partners. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 34(1), 695-709.

15 Siperstein, G., Hardman, M., Wappett, M., & Clary, L. (2001). *National evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Sports program*. A special report. Washington, DC: University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Utah, & Special Olympics, Inc.

- Unified athletes and partners in Europe also experienced improvements in self-esteem. Athletes reported feeling a lot (53%) or a little (34%) better about themselves after participating in the program. Similarly, 38% of partners felt a lot better about themselves, while 30% felt a little better.<sup>16</sup>



Through sports, athletes and partners are given the opportunity to spend time together, oftentimes for the first time, and share a common interest and goal. **This supports the development of friendships between athletes and partners as well as social inclusion on the team.** As partners spend more time with athletes, their attitudes and beliefs about athletes begin to shift, paving the way for greater acceptance of all people with ID.

- A study in Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia found that for many of the partners (57%), playing Unified football was also their **first experience interacting with people with ID**. After participating, the majority of partners (79%) reported that their understanding of people with ID improved.<sup>17</sup>
- Oftentimes, **Unified Sports teams socialize outside of practices and competitions, further building friendships and promoting social inclusion.** In a European study, many athletes (41%) and partners (39%) reported that they spent time with teammates outside of training and competitions.<sup>18</sup> In another Special Olympics survey, 65% of respondents reporting that they did activities together as a team outside of training and competition.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

<sup>17</sup> Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

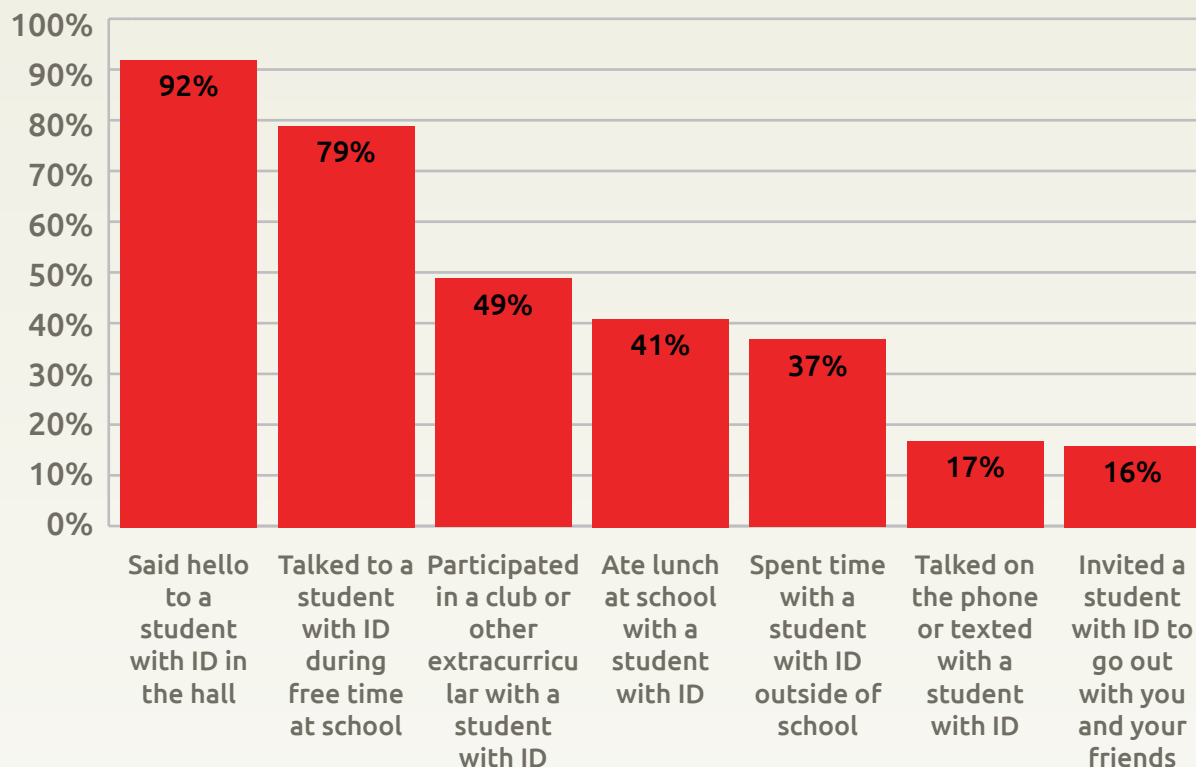
<sup>18</sup> Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

<sup>19</sup> Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.



- In a survey conducted by Special Olympics, **48% of partners reported that their closest friend on the team had ID.**<sup>20</sup>
- An [analysis of data on Unified Sports in U.S. schools](#) found that 79% of Unified Sports partners reported talking to a student with ID during free time at school and 41% reported eating lunch with a student with ID. They also held **positive beliefs about classroom inclusion** for students with disabilities.<sup>21</sup>

## UNIFIED SPORTS PARTICIPANTS REPORTED INTERACTIONS WITH PEERS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN U.S. SCHOOLS<sup>22</sup>



Building friendships and social inclusion among the team is a key impact of Unified Sports. Evaluations have shown that finding committed partners and creating an environment where there is meaningful involvement of all players is important to building a successful program.<sup>23</sup> **Coaches also play an important role in this process** by serving as a role model for attitude and behavior toward people with ID, promoting equal and meaningful involvement of all players, and encouraging social interactions between athletes and partners outside of Unified Sports.<sup>24</sup>

20 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

21 Nanavati, J. (2015). *Unified Sports in School Settings: Evidence of Impact*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

22 Nanavati, J. (2015). *Unified Sports in School Settings: Evidence of Impact*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

23 Siperstein, G., Hardman, M., Wappett, M., & Clary, L. (2001). *National evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Sports program. A special report*. Washington, DC: University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Utah, & Special Olympics, Inc.

24 Dowling, S., McConkey, R., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2010). *Unified gives us a chance: An evaluation of Special Olympics youth unified sports programme in Europe/Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

In addition to being a fun, engaging experience, Unified Sports has a multitude of benefits for athletes and partners. As a result, participants express enthusiasm about the program and a survey conducted by Special Olympics found that **95% of athletes and partners indicated they plan to play Unified Sports again.**<sup>25</sup> The commitment and excitement about the program demonstrates the value of Unified Sports for people with and without ID around the world.

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**“...I like how they developed a friendship. And I noticed it after we came back from our first event and I saw kids interacting in the hallways either just saying hi or giving a high five. And normally those kids wouldn’t even talk to each other prior to participating with this unified team.”**

—Coach, Special Olympics Florida<sup>26</sup>

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## CREATING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

In many communities, playing inclusive sports is thought to be infeasible. According to one study surveying public attitudes, **the vast majority of the public in nine out of ten countries thought people with ID were not capable of playing sports with people without ID.**<sup>27</sup> Unified Sports brings people with ID into the community and highlights their strengths and potential, in stark contrast to the negative stereotypes that are often pervasive.

A [study in Serbia, Ukraine, Poland, Germany, and Hungary](#) sought to determine how Unified Sports contributed to social inclusion not only among teams, but in the broader community. It found that Unified Sports creates a culture of inclusion that is embedded in a wider culture of stigma and discrimination. **By consistently challenging the negative perceptions of people with ID and demonstrating their capabilities, Unified Sports creates “bridges to social inclusion” in the community.**<sup>28</sup>

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25 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

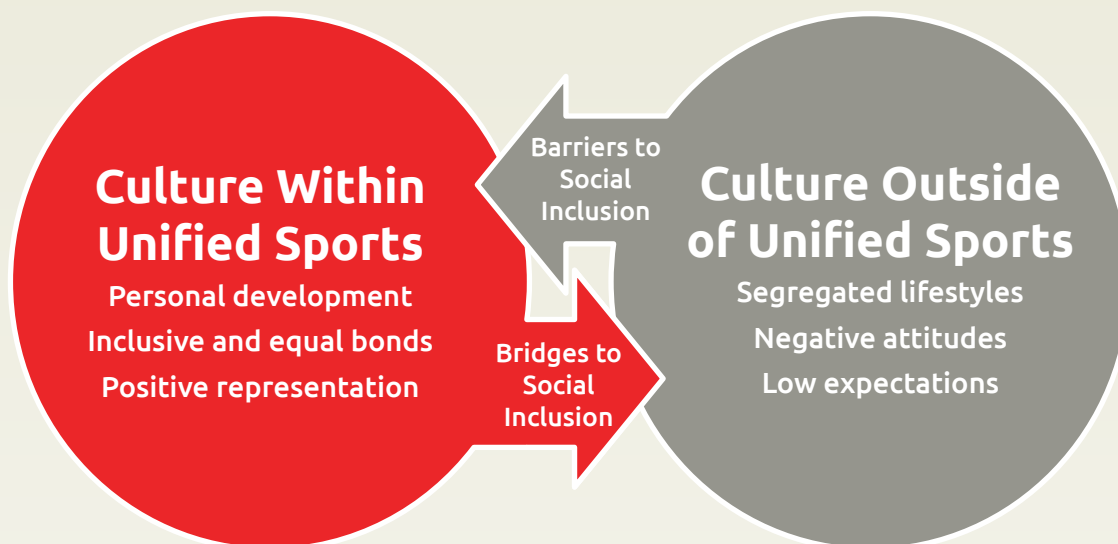
26 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

27 Siperstein, G.N., Norins, J., Corbin, S., & Shriver, T. (2003). *Multinational study of attitudes toward individuals with intellectual disabilities*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

28 Dowling, S., McConkey, R., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2010). *Unified gives us a chance: An evaluation of Special Olympics youth unified sports programme in Europe/Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.







There are four main elements of Unified Sports that challenge barriers to inclusion in the community. These are:

- 1. Promoting the personal development of athletes and partners.** Developing social and sports skills while focusing on ability, rather than disability.
- 2. Creating inclusive and equal bonds among athletes and partners.** Promoting true partnerships that are positive and inclusive.
- 3. Generating positive perceptions of athletes.** Serving as a platform to inform the community about people with ID.
- 4. Building alliances within the community.** Building parent support/advocacy networks and connecting with local sports organizations, schools, governments, etc. for support.<sup>30</sup>

These processes allow social inclusion to occur within Unified teams and in the broader community. Evaluations have shown that Unified Sports has in fact helped athletes enhance their involvement in the community. According to one Special Olympics survey, as a result of participating in Unified Sports, 83% of participants reported that they do more activities in their community.<sup>31</sup> Through the power of sport, Unified Sports connects people with and without ID, building bridges to social inclusion in the broader community and breaking down stigmas.

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**“This team includes everyone, we play as one, we work together, that is the best way for Unified teams.”**

—Unified partner, Ukraine<sup>32</sup>

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29 Dowling, S., McConkey, R., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2010). *Unified gives us a chance: An evaluation of Special Olympics youth unified sports programme in Europe/Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

30 Dowling, S., McConkey, R., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2010). *Unified gives us a chance: An evaluation of Special Olympics youth unified sports programme in Europe/Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

31 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

32 Dowling, S., McConkey, R., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2010). *Unified gives us a chance: An evaluation of Special Olympics youth unified sports programme in Europe/Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

## KEY FINDINGS:

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS RESEARCH



In 2014, over **850,000 people** with and without ID participated in Unified Sports.<sup>31</sup>



**82% of family members** in the United States reported that athletes improved their self-esteem/self-confidence after participating in Unified Sports.<sup>33</sup>



In a survey conducted by Special Olympics, **48% of partners** reported that their closest friend on the team had ID.<sup>35</sup>



By consistently challenging the negative perceptions of people with ID and demonstrating their capabilities, Unified Sports creates **“bridges to social inclusion”** in the community.<sup>36</sup>



Unified football athletes and partners in Europe reported that their **football skills improved** a lot (46%) or a little (46%).<sup>32</sup>



After participating in Unified football, the majority of partners (79%) reported that their **understanding** of people with ID **improved**.<sup>34</sup>



A survey in five countries found that **85%** of athletes reported **exercising more** every week as a result of participating in Unified Sports.<sup>37</sup>

31 2014 Reach Report (2014). Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

32 Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

33 Siperstein, G., Hardman, M., Wappett, M., & Clary, L. (2001). *National evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Sports program*. A special report. Washington, DC: University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Utah, & Special Olympics, Inc.

34 Norins, J., Haradan, C., Parker, R. (2006). *Evaluation of the Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia Unified Football Pilot Project: Findings from Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc. & University of Massachusetts Boston.

35 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

36 Dowling, S., McConkey, R., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2010). *Unified gives us a chance: An evaluation of Special Olympics youth unified sports programme in Europe/Eurasia*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics, Inc.

37 Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.



## RESOURCES:

In their book, **Strategies for Inclusion: A Handbook for Physical Educators**, Lauren J. Lieberman and Cathy Houston-Wilson outline a continuum of options that allow students to move from a self-contained environment to a totally inclusive environment, based on their unique needs. (**Strategies for Inclusion-2nd Edition, A Handbook for Physical Educators**, By Lauren Lieberman, Cathy Houston-Wilson)

<http://www.humankinetics.com/products/all-products/Strategies-for-Inclusion:-A-Handbook-for-Physical-Educators---2E>

**APENS – Adapted Physical Education National Standards - 15 Standards of Specialized Knowledge:**

<http://apens.org/15standards.html>

**Center for Parent Information and Resources:**

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/>

**Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston – Project UNIFY:**

[https://www.umb.edu/csde/research/project\\_unify](https://www.umb.edu/csde/research/project_unify)

**Commit to Inclusion:**

<http://committoinclusion.org/accessible-version/>

**Connecticut State Department of Education - Guidelines for Adapted Physical Education:**

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2663&q=334380>

**Designing and Implementing Effective Adapted Physical Education Programs By Luke Kelly**

**ERIC - Moving to Inclusion. Active Living through Physical Education: Maximizing Opportunities for Students with a Disability:** <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED391318>

**Instructional Models for Physical Education  
By Michael W. Metzler**

**Making Connections: From Theory to Practice in Adapted Physical Education By Janet A. Seaman, Karen P. DePauw, Kimble B. Morton, and Kathy Omo**

**Maryland State Department of Education - A Guide for Serving Students with Disabilities in Physical Education:**

<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/84C4C717-B8FF-486B-8659-79F297DF5B38/19715/Servingstudents2.pdf>

**Moving into the future: National standards for physical education (2nd ed.):**

<http://physedteacher.home.comcast.net/~physedteacher/NatAcadStanPE.pdf>

**National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) - Discover Inclusive Physical Education:**

<http://www.nchpad.org/1402/6261/Discover~Inclusive~Physical~Education>

**National Center on Universal Design for Learning at:**

[www.udlcenter.org/](http://www.udlcenter.org/)

**National Federation of State High School Associations - Coaching Unified Sports:**

<https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000>

**PALAESTRA - Adapted Sport, Physical Education, and Recreational Therapy:**

<http://www.palaestra.com/>

**Shape America:**

<http://www.shapeamerica.org/about/>

**Special Olympics Research Overview:**

<http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/research/Special-Olympics-Research-Overview.pdf>

**Special Olympics Unified Sports® Overview:**

[http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified\\_Sports/Files/4.1-UnifSp%20Models-Overview\\_v26\\_09-20-12.pdf](http://resources.specialolympics.org/uploadedFiles/special-olympics-resources/Topics/Unified_Sports/Files/4.1-UnifSp%20Models-Overview_v26_09-20-12.pdf)

**Special Olympics Unified Sports Interscholastic Unified Sports® Info Sheet:**

<http://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/UnifiedSports/InterscholasticInfo.pdf>

**State of New Jersey Department of Education - Model Curriculum: Comprehensive Health and Physical Education (K-12):**

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/modelcurriculum/peh/>

## **SONJ MISSION STATEMENT:**

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities by giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

## **SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW JERSEY VISION:**

Special Olympics New Jersey will be the premier non-profit sports organization worldwide, known for excellence and innovation in providing opportunities to enrich the lives of all current and potential Special Olympics athletes, their families and society as a whole.

**Special Olympics New Jersey**

**1 Eunice Kennedy Shriver Way, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648**

**(609) 896-8000 / [www.sonj.org](http://www.sonj.org)**







# TEAMWORK IS A BEAUTIFUL THING.



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